

Reconciliation with ourselves

Part 3 in a series of sermons on reconciliation

Ola Wingbrant

2017-02-26

Introduction

Welcome everybody! Especially welcome to those of you who are here for the first time. We are glad that you are here!

Today we have reached the third and last part in our series of sermons regarding reconciliation. The first part was about reconciliation with God, and that it is through Jesus that God offers reconciliation with us. In our second part we talked about reconciliation with each other, and the importance of both seeking and offering forgiveness. Today, I will talk about reconciliation with ourselves.

By the way, my name is Ola Wingbrant, and I have been given the privilege to start this years series of sermons.

So, what do I mean when I say that we need reconciliation with ourselves? I mean that sometimes we experience things that fills us with a pain, shame, guilt, fear or something else that is unpleasant. Things that we cannot either forgive ourselves for, or handle in a proper way. This may be because we have broken our own system of values. Or we may have done something to someone else, who has forgiven us, but we cannot forgive ourselves for doing it. You can probably come up with several other scenarios as well.

Basically we carry around loads of stuff that we have put away in small boxes in our mind that we try to avoid to open, because of what they inflict on us. Our mind becomes a labyrinth of "no-go" or "red zones" that we try to avoid. This affects our behavior, our relationships, and our freedom. This is nothing God ever intended, and is a consequence of our fallen nature. This luggage we carry is something that breaks down our integrity as human beings.

As I was preparing this sermon I had a hard time finding a good starting point. When I asked the Lord about it, he pointed me to the story of Peter, and the disciples last hours together with Jesus. It is a quite amazing story, both about

the need of reconciliation with ourselves, and how Jesus wants to help us in that regard.

A lofty promise

So, that's where I want to start today. We enter the story just after the last supper. The last supper was the last meal that Jesus ate together with his disciples before he was arrested, sentenced to death, and crucified. Jesus and the disciples are on their way to the Mount of Olives. In Mark 14:27-31 we read

27 "You will all fall away," Jesus told them, "for it is written:

"I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered."

28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

29 Peter declared, "Even if all fall away, I will not."

30 "Truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "today -- yes, tonight -- before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times."

31 But Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you." And all the others said the same.

So, this is a quite lofty promise by Peter, and some quite harsh words from Jesus.

The break down

The story continues with the group going into the garden of Gethsemane. There, through some turmoil, Jesus gets arrested, while all his disciples flee. Peter, however, decides to follow the company at some distance, which takes him to the high priest's courtyard. We read in Mark 14:66-72:

66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him.

"You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus," she said.

68 But he denied it. "I don't know or understand what you're talking about," he said, and went out into the entryway.

69 When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, "This fellow is one of them." 70 Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, "Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean."

71 He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, "I don't know this man you're talking about."

72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times." And he broke down and wept.

How do you think Peter felt in that moment? How do you think he felt the following days?

I think there are lots of things happening to Peter in that moment. I think he was totally devastated. Not only has what he has been living for for the last three or so years been swept away. His dreams of a restored kingdom has been shattered not only to pieces, but been ground to dust. Jesus, his king to be, is about to be sentenced to death. But the worst part is that he has disowned Jesus not one, not two, but three times. This was his king to be! His Messiah!

In this moment I think Peter's self-esteem and confidence, is about as high as the soles of his sandals. I think he feels a deep shame. All his solemn promises came to nothing. More than anything else, I think Peter wants that last minute in the courtyard back. He wants it back so badly. To replay it, to relive it, and to answer in a different way.

Have you ever been there? Have you ever done something that you regret so badly that you want that one, single minute back? That moment of decision, to relive it, and to change it? That is were Peter is.

Isolation

What happens next is that Jesus is convicted and crucified, and his body is laid in a tomb. However, this is shortly before the sabbath is to begin, so there is no time for a proper burial. This is a fact that some women decide to fix. Early in the morning the day after the sabbath several of them goes to the tomb in order to give Jesus a proper burial. But once they get there, they are met by an empty tomb and an angel. Mark 16:6-7 says:

6 "Don't be alarmed," [the angel] said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. 7 But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He

is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.”

Note the specific reference to Peter. It says the disciples *and* Peter. It seems like Peter has begun to place himself outside of the group. We cannot know for sure, the text doesn't say, but it seems like Peter does not consider himself worthy of being a disciple any longer.

This is not a very uncommon pattern for us. We are so ashamed or riddled with guilt that we play down our own value. We tell ourselves that we are not worthy, or that we are not wanted in this or that company, or that people despise us. We do this because we despise ourselves. Unfortunately this is not very helpful. The more we try to isolate ourselves the less people will try to accompany us, and the easier it becomes for us to tell ourselves that people despise or dislike us. It becomes a spiral downwards.

Restoration

The disciples, including Peter, follow Jesus command in Mark 14:28 and end up in Galilee. The story continues in John chapter 21. The disciples have been out fishing all night. Early in the morning the resurrected Jesus shows up on the beach, and they all share a meal together. In John 21:15-17 it says

5 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

What is happening here? Well, this is *not* Jesus trying to get Peter to apologize for his failure. That is already forgiven. As we have seen Jesus knew about that way ahead of Peter.

Instead this is Jesus trying to get Peter to accept and forgive himself. There is of course something symbolic in the fact that Peter has the opportunity to confess his love for Jesus three times, at a camp fire, in the company of several others. It is the reverse of what happened in the courtyard. This outer setting helps him.

However, I also think that he actually need the three rounds in order to get what Jesus is saying. He needs the three rounds for it to sink in. Through the first two rounds it is as if Jesus words don't get through. There is no emotional reaction. It is as if Peter says "You know I love you. But it doesn't matter, I can't be a part of your company". Jesus response "Feed my lambs" fall on dead ears. But they are essential. It is an image through which Jesus is saying "Lead my disciples".

The third time is different. Peter reacts emotionally. The text says He is grieved, saddened or hurt by Jesus question the third time. However, I think there is a positive shift in Peter that comes after his own words, "Lord, you know all things ..." I think Peter suddenly realizes that Jesus knows all things, *and he still wants Peter to lead his disciples*. Jesus questions drive Peter to see things from a different perspective! We know that this shift takes place, because when we read the rest of the story, in Acts, it is different Peter that we meet. He is much more humble than he is in Mark, but also much more bold, and he is a leader.

Jesus did not give that minute in the courtyard, that moment of decision, back to Peter. And he will not give any of them back to us either. But he made Peter view the incident from a different perspective. I think this is exactly what Jesus wants to do together with us and for us as well. When we lock stuff up in our mind or try to suppress, or forget pain, shame, guilt, fear, or whatever, Jesus wants to help us view that from different perspective.

I know this may sound simplistic, and I have full respect for the fact that reconciliation with ourselves may take time, and be a long process, and a journey. But that journey starts with a decision to open up. By open up to Jesus, and ask him to help us view the stuff we carry from a different perspective, we open up for ourselves as well. This is frightening, as we fear the reaction it is going to generate. It is painful, as we relive the events. But it is also the path towards freedom, peace, and integrity. You see, stuff grows in the dark where it is hidden. It controls us through anxiety and fear. We create a labyrinth of no-go or "red zones" in our mind. But by bringing such things into the open instead of locking them up, they tend to shrink, shrivel and lose their power. Like Peter we my need several rounds at it. Sometimes we may need professional or semiprofessional help, like Celebrate Recovery, in order to do this. But that is what community is for.

The role of community

And community is essential. Peter was in a community that accepted him, even after his failure. And when Jesus "entered" that community, Peter was relieved from his shame. He was able to see the incident from a different perspective, and to be reconciled with himself.

Before we end I want to contrast this story with that of another disciple, Judas. We can read in Matthew 27:3-5:

3 When Judas, who had betrayed [Jesus], saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty pieces of silver to the chief priests and the elders. 4 "I have sinned," he said, "for I have betrayed innocent blood."

"What is that to us?" they replied. "That's your responsibility."

5 So Judas threw the money into the temple and left. Then he went away and hanged himself.

Do you see the difference? Judas was also riddled with guilt. But he had no community. All he met was indifference and legalism. We as a church must remember this. A loving community where Jesus can "enter" may be the difference between restoration or deprivation, between freedom and being consumed by shame, guilt, or fear, between life and death. Remember the downward spiral I talked about. Judas had nothing to cancel that spiral.